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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: PREDICTABLE POLITICAL PARTY COMMENTARY ON
EU AUGUST WAR REPORT

REF: TBILISI 1786

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Kent Logsdon for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

¶1. (U) Summary: Domestic political reaction to the Tagliavini report (reftel) predictably corresponded to long-held political perceptions. Various non-parliamentary opposition leaders took the opportunity, citing a finding in the report criticizing Georgia for a disproportionate use of force when it launched its August 7, 2008 attack on Tskhinvali, to sharply criticize President Saakashvili. Saakashvili for his part cited numerous findings in the same report as confirmation of Russia's continued violation of international law and illegal occupation of Georgia. The parliamentary opposition generally supported the report. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Comment: The latest round of criticism of Saakashvili's handling of the war from the non-parliamentary opposition was the sharpest to date. The vast majority of non-parliamentary opposition commentary avoided publicly addressing or commenting on sections of the report critical of Russian action, choosing instead to try to hit the GoG over the head with the report's criticism. Despite being able to cite the EU report (which is viewed by most Georgian observers as very favorable to Georgia) to support their arguments, this sharp criticism may prove to be a losing PR strategy in a country that still overwhelmingly blames last August's events on the Russians. End Comment.

Non-Parliamentary Opposition Comments

¶3. (C) Some non-parliamentary opposition leaders described the report as a disaster. National Forum leader Gubaz Sanikidze said the report shows that President Saakashvili is an international criminal and was further evidence that "the Georgian state is headed by a maniac, a sick man." Sanikidze called Saakashvili a traitor and demanded that he be prosecuted. Nino Burjanadze (Democratic Movement - United Georgia) stated the need "to set Georgia free of Saakashvili's regime, so that the people can elect a truly national, accountable, and state-minded leadership." Burjanadze said Saakashvili had no legitimacy to remain in power. In a meeting with the Charge, Burjanadze repeated her public comments, noting that she had tempered her thoughts in public because she loved her country and did not want to destroy it. Kakha Kukava (Conservatives) suggested that the report would become "a tool for Russia to mount more pressure on Georgia." Shalva Natelashvili (Labor) said the report would trigger "further isolation of Georgia" and that Russia's actions were "in the framework of international law."

¶4. (U) Irakli Alasania (Our Georgia - Free Democrats) issued a statement in coordination with New Rights and Republicans that was also critical, but noticeably more moderate. It called the report "a very grave assessment of the actions by the Georgian president," and called Saakashvili's decision to fire on Tskhinvali politically irresponsible. At the same

time, Alasania's statement also made note that Russian authorities "grossly violated all norms of international law."

Saakashvili Sees it Differently

15. (U) President Saakashvili called the report a "great diplomatic victory for Georgia," noting the tremendous pressure the EU was under from Russia to produce a pro-Russian report. Saakashvili said the report refuted Russian lies and proved as untrue several Russian claims, including that Georgia attacked Russian peacekeepers; that attacks on Russian citizens justified their intervention; and that Georgia committed genocide. Saakashvili also Qthat Georgia committed genocide. Saakashvili also highlighted the finding that ethnic cleansing had taken place in South Ossetia and Abkhazia under Russian auspices. In further comments made during an awards ceremony for former Lithuanian President Landsbergis, Saakashvili focused his comments on the report's criticism of Georgia. He stressed that it was his "holy duty to respond with all types of resistance when a foreign country's army enters into your country." He added that "those who have not fired a shot have disappeared from the map . . . Finland fired and maintained its independence," referring to the 1939 Soviet attack on Finland.

Parliamentary Opposition - Pretty Good Report

16. (U) Vice Speaker Levan Vepkhadze (Christian Democratic Movement) called the report "politically balanced." He said he thought the report should have been stricter in its characterizations of Russian actions. Vepkhadze added that in some cases the report "created more questions than

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answers," but that it was objective and its findings were worth strong consideration. Vepkhadze went on to say the report "rejected Russia's claims that Georgia started the war on August 7" and showed that "Georgia was responding to Russian provocations."
LOGSDON